

HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

Property Address:	2227 13th Street NW	Agenda
Landmark/District:	U Street Historic District	Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	July 23, 2015	X Denial Calendar
H.P.A. Number:	15-484	X Concept
Staff Reviewer:	Anne Brockett	X Alteration
		New Construction

The applicant, property owner Daniel Metz, seeks concept review to construct a new front basement entrance and make rear modifications to the rowhouse at 2227 13th Street NW, a contributing building in the U Street Historic District. The house is one of 12 Victorian bay-front rowhouses on the east side of this block built together as speculative housing in 1886. The houses are two stories with projecting bays capped by metal pediments, and have cast iron steps and paired windows dressed with ornate millwork. With few exceptions, original components and ornament, like cast iron steps, are intact. The house at 2227 has a historic basement entrance that is quite narrow and steep.

Project Description

The applicant proposes to lower the basement slab two feet and construct a new basement entrance at the front of the house in order to accommodate a new accessible basement living space for an extended family member. At the rear, the non-historic attached garage will be removed, the dogleg infilled at the basement and first floor, a deck with an areaway beneath will be constructed, and door and window locations will be modified.

For the work on the front, two designs have been developed. Option 1 proposes to abandon the existing basement entrance under the cast iron steps and replace the two small basement windows in the front face of the projecting bay with a door/sidelight combination measuring 5½ feet in width. Access to the new entrance would be via a separate areaway and turning stairs of eight risers. The stairs and areaway would project beyond the face of the bay a combined six feet. The cast iron steps would not be altered.

After consultation with staff, Option 2 was submitted in which, instead of altering the bay, the cast iron steps would be altered to provide access under the front door. In this version the cast iron steps would be moved forward 3 feet and an extended deck would be installed at the main entrance. The extended deck would allow head-height clearance for a new straight run basement stair and provide access to the existing basement entrance. The areaway for these new basement stairs would extend nearly the full depth of the parking and nearly reach the sidewalk.

Evaluation and Recommendation

The alterations to the rear are compatible and consistent with alterations along alleys throughout the city's historic districts. However, neither of the proposed concepts for a basement entrance is compatible with the historic district or consistent with the historic preservation act and the Board's adopted *Preservation and Design Guidelines for Basement Entrances and Windows*.

The Option 1 proposal to install a new doorway on the face of the bay is contrary to the guidelines on several points:

- Character defining features like projecting bays should not be altered to accommodate new basement entrances (2.1, 2.4);
- New entrances should be located beneath the existing front door to replicate a historic (and in this case existing) condition so that the basement entrance remains subordinate to the main entrance (1.1, 1.2); and
- The stair and areaway should not dominate the setting of the property, which this proposal does with its areaway and stairs that are distinct from the main walk and project very close to the sidewalk (1.3, 3.1).

The Option 2 proposal to alter the cast iron stairs rather than the bay has fewer shortcomings. It, too, would alter a character-defining feature by changing the dimensions of the cast iron steps (which is not consistent with principles 2.1 and 2.4), but the change would be apparent from fewer vantage points than the alternative. The best advantage of this scheme over the other is that the basement entrance would remain in its historic location inconspicuously under the main entrance. The new basement stairs, while projecting too far forward to be considered compatible (1.4) could at least be considered a shared element with the walk to the main entrance, which is the approach that is recommended by the *Guidelines* (1.3).

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board find the concept of a new front basement entrance to be incompatible with the U Street Historic District and inconsistent with the preservation act. However, should an entrance of this type be deemed necessary, Option 2 is the preferred option because of its lesser impact on historic fabric and the overall character of the house and setting and is more readily reversible.